True or False: Portable Fire Extinguishers

1. As long as the right employees know where we keep the fire extinguishers, it’s OK if everyone else in the yard doesn’t know.

False: The employers must provide portable fire extinguishers and mount, locate and identify them so that they are readily accessible to employees without subjecting employees to possible injury. 1910.157 (c)(1).

2. Because the company has an emergency action plan for the yard that designates only certain employees as authorized to use the available portable fire extinguishers, I only need to train the designated employees on the proper use of the extinguishers.

True: Where an employer has established and implemented an emergency action plan that designates certain employees to be the only employees authorized to use the available fire extinguishers, and which requires all other employees to immediately evacuate the affected work area upon the sounding of a fire alarm, the employer is exempt from the general distribution requirements and need only train those employees who have been designated to use the fire extinguishers. See 1910.157(b)(2) and 1910.157(g)(4).

3. The employer can pick and choose where to place its portable fire extinguishers so long as there is at least one in each work area.

False: OSHA 1910.157(d) includes specific selection and distribution requirements for portable fire extinguishers. In particular, the employer shall distribute portable fire extinguishers for use by employees on Class A fires so that the travel distance for employees to any extinguisher is 75 feet (22.9 m) or less. See 1910.157(d)(2). Likewise, the employer shall distribute portable fire extinguishers for use by employees on Class B fires so that the travel distance from the Class B hazard area to any extinguisher is 50 feet (15.2 m) or less. See 1910.157(d)(4).

For an explanation of the types of fire extinguishers, go to –
https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/portable_about.html#Types.

4. As long as my employees know where fire extinguishers are, I don’t need to worry about creating a special place for them.

False: The general OSHA requirement is that the fire extinguishers be mounted, located and identified so that they are readily accessible to employees without subjecting them to possible injury. 1910.157(c)(1). OSHA recommends that fire extinguishers be mounted on brackets or in wall cabinets to prevent them from being moved or damaged.

5. Since fire extinguishers are easy to learn how to use, I only need to train my employees once, at the time of hiring, on the proper use of fire extinguishers.

False: The employer must provide an educational program that familiarizes employees with the general principles of fire extinguisher use and the hazards involved with incipient fire fighting when employees are first hired and once a year thereafter. See 1910.157(g)(1) and 1910.157(g)(2). The same applies where the employer has designated certain employees to use the fire extinguishers: they must be trained upon designation and at least annually thereafter. See 1910.157(g)(3) and 1910.157(g)(4).

6. The employer should inspect portable fire extinguishers at least once a year.

False: Portable extinguishers shall be visually inspected monthly. 1910.157(e)(2).

7. The employer should have portable fire extinguishers tested at least once a year.

True: The employer shall assure that portable fire extinguishers are subjected to an annual maintenance check. The employer shall record the annual maintenance date and retain this record for one year after the last entry or the life of the shell, whichever is less. The record shall be available to the Assistant Secretary upon request. 1910.157(e)(3).

8. The only maintenance record required is the tag on the portable fire extinguisher.

False: The employer must record the annual maintenance date and retain the record for one year after the last entry or the life of the shell, whichever is less. The employer must also make the record available to OSHA inspectors upon request. 1910.157(e)(3).

9. Even though I have fire extinguishers distributed throughout the yard, if any one extinguisher is removed for maintenance or recharging, an alternative equivalent protection must be provided.

True: The employer must provide alternative equivalent protection when portable fire extinguishers are removed from service for maintenance and recharging. 1910.157(e)(5).

10. No matter what the situation or condition of the fire, employees should retrieve and use the portable fire extinguishers – they’ve been trained to use them and that’s what the fire extinguishers are for.

False: Fire extinguishers are only effective against “incipient stage fire” which means a fire which is in the initial or beginning stage and which can be controlled or extinguished by a portable fire extinguisher, Class II standpipe or small hose systems without the need for protective clothing or breathing apparatus. 1910.155(c)(26).

OSHA recommends that employees evacuate immediately if the extinguisher has been emptied and the fire is not out or if the fire progresses beyond the incipient stage.

See https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/portable_use.html#PASS.